



The Beast



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Chapter 1 by Kallaway Haystings

The beast shifted, ever so slightly. I shuddered as I breathed in the smell of rotting flesh. Its rattling breath echoed with the sound of all those who had died before me, come to ask a favor of the beast in the woods. Lights flickered in and out of the trees, lost souls who would forever wander the woods till the beast died. Calling out to any who dared enter the forest. None had survived the beast once a request had been set before it.

The story went that the beast had lived in the woods for hundreds of years, and could grant wishes to those pure of heart. Only those in desperate need, those who had nothing but death in their future to gamble on, would call upon the beast. If it found you in error or lie, it would feast on you, condemning you to live in a forever half life, in a world of shadows.

And yet here I stood.

I stepped forward in front of the beast, and slowly, it raised its head to fix me with a cold blank stare.

Chapter 2 by nighteve



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"She was young and didn't know what she was doing. Please... I need her."

The beast stared me down, its eyes all ice and steel.

You are worthy, but your sister was not. I cannot simply give her back.

"Please. I'll do anything!"

Anything? the beast murmured. Anything is a great commitment.

"Anything. Anything."

A grotesque smile spread across its face.

A fair trade. A soul for a soul.

I faltered.

Take it or leave it,

"Yes."

Chapter 3 by Artis Planeswalker



It's cruel maw opened wider and wider, jaws that could devour anything in a single vicious snap. My muscles froze in fear, I could not move, afraid that any movement would cause those jaws to claim me. From the shadowed throat I saw movement. Winding out from between it's massive teeth came my sister.

With fear and bewilderment she ran to me and I wrapped my arms around her.

"You came!" She managed to get out between sobs.

"Hush now," I whispered to her, "I told you I would always protect you."

As I step between her and the beast she clings to my arm.

"What are you doing!?" Her terrified eyes darting quickly between the beast and me.

"A deal is a deal," I tell her sadly, "your soul for mine is a worthy trade."

The beasts jaw snap shut with the sound of a tomb being sealed, it's cold feral eyes stare unblinking.

"I decide when to take what is mine," it growls, "Now begone, but heed my call or the deal is off and both your souls will be mine."

Chapter 4 by windfox



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Downstairs embers still burn in the hearth fire. I use a poker to sweep them into a tidy glowing pile and place a small handful of tinder and three small logs on top. With a deep breath, I blow until the wood ignites and the fireplace is alive and dancing again with a warm golden fire. No matter how close I stand to the flickering flames, nothing seems to chase the chill out of my bones or the darkness out of my heart.

Mother and father knew nothing of our secret. My sister and I had vowed to never speak of it to anyone. No one other than the two of us knew what she had done and what I had sacrificed to save her. We had passed off her disappearance to a foolish child's game gone too far. A prank of hide and seek that had seen her holed up in a hunter's shack on the edge of the forest for an unusually long time, lost and scared but with enough food and water to manage until I miraculously 'found' her.

But Avenna was never in a hunter's shack, she was down the gullet of a trickster demigod of the northern forests. She was swallowed whole and her spirit was stuck dwelling in the land of the Shades. I had known from the moment of her death what had truly happened. Avenna had so many foolish wishes and just as many foolish ideas to try and make them come true. Seeking out the Beast of the Forest was the last time she ever wished for Lord Langston Rivall to ever fall in love with her.

I set the poker back in its place just as mother comes out of her bedroom wrapped in an intricately knit purple shawl. "Whatever are you doing up at this hour Rachel?" she queries me as she goes fishing through the cupboard for her favorite late night blend of herbal tea.

"Another nightmare..." I murmur quietly, determined that I will only hold one secret from my parents if I can help it.

Her soft brown eyes look at me with pity. I'd been having nightmares for so long now it seemed like it was simply part of who I would forever be. In town I had earned an identity of a troubled girl. Rumors from the local apothecary spread fast that I was deprived of sleep, deprived of

good health, deprived of any sense of security. A selfish, overly paranoid, shy young woman. Little did the healers and sages I consulted know that I was a girl who would be if they knew the bitter truth their remedies and rumors would be little more than.

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Chapter 5 by Kate



The night went on quietly. I was half awake, telling myself it was just a dream, yet every night it felt more real. Suddenly the air became thick, fear struck me. My eyes racing around, looking at every inch of the room. There was nothing. A sigh of relief froze mid way, it whispered. "Who are you", I asked fearfully. It whispered back in an unknown language. The whispers grew louder until it completely filled the room. I shut my eyes hard as I could wishing it would stop. Everything went silent, followed by a cold breeze. When I opened my eyes I found myself no longer in my room, but in the middle of the forest, kneeling before the beast.

The memories of Five Years ago came rushing back, like it was yesterday. My mind was racing, yet my body remained frozen in fear.

Chapter 6 by Windlion



I have called you, the beast rumbled. I am pleased that you have returned.

"I ... have?" My fear-frozen mind slipped into hysteria, and I struggled not to collapse in laughter. "I have! I ... was afr-afraid you had forgotten me, the days and nights, oh the nights were --"

Enough. You were given a great boon, many years with your sister and your family.

"I -- I was. Thank ... thank you." The beast stared back at me; a renewed wave of its foul odor washed over me as it opened its jaws.

Now it is my turn to ask.

"To --"

There is something I would have you do for me. It may cost you more than losing your life.

I stared at the beast. What horrible task would matter so much that such a creature would ask it of me, when it could rightfully demand? Possibly, I would be allowed to say no.

Still.

"What ever you ask, I am bound to do it. I will do more than fair with me, and I am in your debt."

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I inhaled, feeling its malodorous vapors filling my lungs. "I will do the best that I can."

Chapter 7 by Windlion



The beast nodded. Good, because you have no choice.

It gestured at a strangely made hourglass.

Go to the palace of the King, carrying this with you. While you carry it, no one will come close enough to touch you.

I reached out -- but the beast snarled. Leave it be for now!

Tell the King that I will have his daughter the Princess as my bride.

Then, and only then, turn this glass over, so that the sand begins to fall. While it falls, no one in the kingdom will be able to move, save you.

Go and find the princess. Bring her to me, and your debt to me will be relieved.

"I -- I understand. How long will the spell last?"

The beast shifted. Not long enough. You should be able to escape the castle grounds. Beyond that, you will be hunted by everyone in the kingdom, and will be burdened with an outraged young woman.

"I see why you say it may cost me my life," I said wryly.

I said that it might cost you more than your life. Do not fail.

Chapter 8 by Windlion



This doesn't make sense, does it?

If the Beast has this astonishing power to freeze everyone in the kingdom, why does it need me to kidnap the princess?

And how does this fit in with the plan that brought me to this moment? If I do as it asks, I will be taking the place of the princess is not volunteering to take my place.

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No. This is my burden.

I pick up the hourglass, carefully, and examine it. Then, quickly, before the Beast can see my intention, I hurl it against the rock wall!

"NO!!!" roars the Beast, and I fall to my knees.

The sand spilling out is catching fire on the rocks, and the flames are spreading quickly. A crack opens up in the cavern's ceiling, and then another, and giant boulders crash to the floor.

"NO, NO, NO!!!" it howls. I see it swatting away falling rocks as if they were flies.

One of them crushes my legs, though, and I cry out in pain. The Beast hears me, and stalks forward.

"You will suffer for this treachery FOREVER!" it howls, and its jaws open wide to strike but a gigantic piece of the ceiling slams down on it, plastering it to the floor.

Is it dead? As likely so as I am. But this is the better way for the tale to end.

My eyes close.

the end

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